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ABSTRACT

It is hypothesized that free, spontaneous interaction cannot be easily attained in language courses which are rigid and mechanical. For this reason, the author urges the development of instructional materials which facilitate a smooth and natural transition from "skill-getting" to "skill-using." Discussion of Jerome Bruner's theory of language learning entails a review of three parallel cognitive systems for processing information and storing it for use. They include the enactive, the iconic or perceptual, and the symbolic. Methods and selected examples illustrate how to move from the teacher-directed language demonstration to student-directed application, to autonomous student production, and finally to spontaneous interaction. (Author/RL)

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FROM LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE TO COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract

Free, spontaneous interaction cannot be an attractive extra in a program which is rigid and mechanical. We must develop a smooth and natural transition from skill-getting to skill-using. Language learning, like other human activities, involves three parallel cognitive systems for processing information and storing it for use: the enactive, the iconic or perceptual, and the symbolic. We must select the type of activity appropriate to the kind of learning involved in various aspects of second language acquisition. Practice exercises should always be pseudo-communication, moving from teacher-directed demonstration to student-directed application, to autonomous student production, and to spontaneous interaction, every extension of linguistic competence being tested out immediately in natural communicative use. Practice exercises can be purely manipulative (Type A) or can require student autonomy in selection (Type B). It is the Type B activity which should predominate if students are to develop the confidence they need for interaction, which is the use of language for the natural purposes of language.

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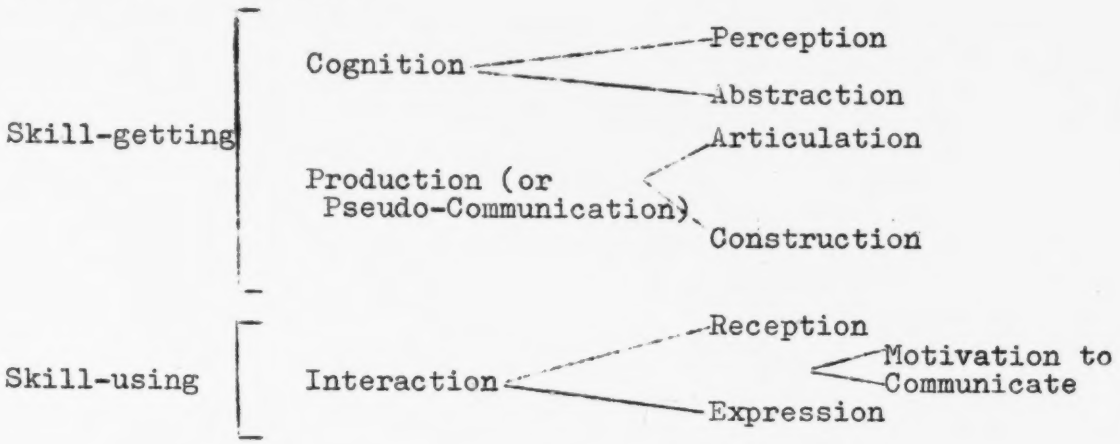
The discussion that follows uses the terminology of the model of essential processes in language teaching which I developed in "Talking off the Tops of their Heads," TESOL Quarterly, Vol.6 (1972), 71-81. The model is reproduced below for reference.



In "Talking off the Tops of their Heads" I emphasized the need for providing students from the earliest stages with a great deal of practice in using language for the natural uses of language, that is, practice in interaction (skill-using), and I proposed a number of activities that involved spontaneous and genuine uses of language. In this paper I wish to consider

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gap in my model between skill-getting and skill-using and make proposals for a smooth and natural transition from production practice to interaction.

If free, spontaneous interaction practice is an attractive extra in a program which is rigid and mechanical, we should not be surprised to see our students develop a kind of schizophrenia: Personality A, which is submissive and malleable, produces correctly constructed sequences as directed in intensive practice, while Personality B asserts its own individuality, completely ignoring, when engaging in autonomous interaction, what Personality A has been so laboriously practicing. How then can we develop our program so that such a schizophrenic situation will not develop?

The important questions to be considered in movement <u>toward</u> spontaneous expression or communicative competence are:

<u>Where do we come from</u>?

and <u>By what route</u>?

All kinds of routes may be followed to reach a destination. Some instructions unfortunately are not quite sure where the goal is or how best to get there. They take their students by routes which are circuitous, lead to dead-ends, backtrack, and make the going rough and difficult so that attention is on the going instead of the destination and students begin to feel that the journey itself is the most important thing, completely losing sight of the goal. This is the way it is when students are completely preoccupied with good performance in pseudo-communication. Production practice is necessary for developing linguistic competence, without which there can be no solidly

based communicative competence, but it is less demanding for instructor and students than tryihg to develop communicative competence itself. Consequently, many find it an unexciting but comfortable haven in which to take refuge on the way, and never reach the goal at all. At least they can recognize here something tangible for their efforts.

Other routes, through similar country, lead to the destination directly but they demand effort and persistence. The students to whom these routes are indicated know where they are going and what they will be able to do when they get there. They are prepared psychologically and practically for the goal of communicative competence and all their activities are directed toward it and toward it alone. These students never allow themselves to become absorbed in any activity on the way as an end in itself but always as a means to a clearly recognized end and as an activity of the same generic nature as the one they have in view.

We see examples of the route - as - goal when instructors are chiefly interested in eliciting near-native pronunciation in imitation and choir-like perfection in construction exercises. We see instructor and students settling down in cozy comfort on the way when smooth and effortless production of correctly constructed sentences, even complicated and intricate ones, satisfies and students rarely engage in authentic interaction.

Merely adding a supplement of interaction activities of the kind elaborated in "Talking off the Tops of their Heads" will not provide the answer. <u>Such activities should not be supplemental, but should spring naturally and inevitably from</u>

the types of activities engaged in for skill-getting. The only way to avoid the schizophrenia of Personality A and Personality B is to develop the whole program with Personality B in mind, so that Personality B is free to operate imaginatively at all times. This will not be possible with a patched-up program -- something added here and something added there while the bulk of the program is based on wrong assumptions. We must rethink the program so that all efforts are directed toward the perceived goal!

In many programs much effort is put into the production of what are sometimes called "controlled drills" and reliance is placed on a carefully organized step-by-step progression toward the goal. Yet, despite careful planning and fastidious practice, students still stumble and falter when trying to express their own ideas in the foreign language.

I would like to suggest that we look here for the source of our schizophrenia. Our conventional controlled drills are based on assumptions which make them incompatible with our ultimate goal of communicative competence. They are usually based entirely on manipulation of language elements as though that is all language learning consists of. Nor is the answer, as some would suggest, merely a matter of switching over to the learning of explicit grammar rules that we then attempt to put into operation in language material, important as the comprehension of the syntactic rules of a language may be. We must recognize that linguistic competence, "knowing" a language, involves not one, but several types of cognitive processes.

Bruner posits three parallel systems in human cognition for processing information and storing it for use, all capable of partial transformation one into the other.[2] They reflect the three ways people can "know" something.[3] If we understand these three ways (enactive, iconic or perceptual, and symbolic) we can analyse in practical fashion what the student has to learn in learning a second language.[4] We can then categorize the various aspects of linguistic competence as belonging largely to one or another of these systems, and devise the types of practice which are most appropriate for the kind of learning involved in each case. 'Here we must not be discouraged by people who tell us that nobody knows just what "knowing" a language involves. If we had to wait until complete and irrefutable theoretical knowledge were attained in such a complex area as language acquisition, we would be forced to give up all activity in language teaching. Theoretical advances are sparked and verified through practical observations. We must act on what is known at a particular stage and continually adapt and readapt our procedures as new knowledge becomes available.)

The first representational system in human cognition which Bruner describes is the <u>enactive</u>. This system is acquired through manipulation and action by a process of stimulus-response conditioning. In this case we "know" by an habitual pattern of responsive action. Mediating responses transform the stimulus prior to the response and these are processes of understanding which make the response a personal one. Because of this internal transformation of the stimulus different people require different

time intervals for making the response. In a foreign language what we can "know" through active response are such things as the arbitrary structural associations which can be set out in paradigms. In actual meaningful language use, however, the other two cognitive systems are immediately involved: knowing the form of a verb ending after a particular pronoun may be an habitual reaction, but knowing when to use that particular ending in the expression of a message is much more complex. There is, therefore, a role, but a limited one, for stimulus-response conditioning in making automatic the production of certain arbitrary elements of surface structure. (Bruner suggests it is also appropriate for learning the production of strange sounds, although, once again, learning when to use the sound as it has been learned and when to adapt and modify it involves other types of representation.)

Bruner's second system of representation is the iconic[5], acquired through perceptual organization and imagery (that is, auditory and visual pattern recognition). Here we build on the inductive recognition of the gestalt: the whole consisting of systematically distributed interrelated parts. The identification of patterns in what we hear and see aids memory. Here we must devise methods for recognition and assimilation of recurring systematic arrangements of formal features and their acceptable rearrangements. Such features as fixed word order in sentence types or in syntactic relationships and structural patterns which continually recur in association with each other are appropriately listed here. Bruner warns us that "affective and motivational

factors affect imagery and perceptual organization strikingly." For this reason we must look for individual differences in perception of auditory (and visual) patterning and realize that the disconcerted or embarrassed student will often fail to recognize auditory patterns and may develop, as a result, an emotional block against all auditory activity. The bored student will simply not retain them.

Thirdly, we have the symbolic representational system which operates through internalized language and logical processes in the formation of concepts. This symbolic system enables us to categorize and to establish hierarchies of categories, principles, and rules, to bring order into the complexity of what is being learned, permitting "a transition from merely orderly behavior to logical behavior"[6], This systematization of the language may be established inductively by the student himself, but in many cases it can be acquired more rapidly through the deductive medium of the explanations of the teacher or the textbook (using language, "the second signal system" as Pavlov called it). Nevertheless, the student, whether guided or not, must abstract features and synthesize them into rules of operation which will create new meanings. It is the symbolic representational system which processes the many complexities of syntax through which formal features and arrangements of features attain vigorous life in the expression of the infinite nuances of meaning[7]. The student goes beyond the specific instances in which he has seen the forms of language in operation into the creative use of language in novel situations.

These three types of representation coexist in an adult student's cognitive system -- they are not stages of learning. Any or all may be appropriately activated at any point in a learning process: it is for us to analyse for what aspects of language learning they are appropriate, and continually interweave them in learning activities as they are interwoven in actual language use, if we wish our students to do more than perform well in exercises of a specific kind.

Types of intensive practice exercises must, then, be varied. Mere repetition and manipulation will help with only a minor portion of what must be known. The associations in a paradigm are arbitrary (I get, he gets), but the notion of paradigmatic variations (the fact that the new language has more or less paradigmatic associations than the student's native language) is conceptual and must be understood before knowledge of the details of the paradigm can be effective in use. Similarly, formal features of tenses are paradigmatic and may be learned by rote, but of themselves they are so much useless baggage. Using them appropriately involves conceptual understanding of the way in which the new language expresses time relationships.

We must develop more and better ways of dealing with the more purely conceptual aspects of language: the patterns of arrangements and the intricate complexities of interacting systems and subsystems of rules.[8] These cannot be assimilated absent-mindedly. In each of these cases "knowing" depends on awareness of abstractions such as similarities, differences, function, and interactive relationships. Without such awareness the student cannot operate

confidently within the new system. This awareness can only develop when the student focuses on abstract operations. Such focus depends on how personally he is involved in correct selection from among the possible variations of the system. We must concentrate on the types of activities which elict this personal involvement.

In my model I have referred to production exercises as pseudo-communication, and in "Talking off the Tops of their Heads" I emphasized the first segment of this term -- pseudo-communication -- in order to contrast it with real interaction activities. Here I wish to emphasize the second segment -- pseudo-communication -- because this, I believe, is the way we can bridge the gap between skill-getting and skill-using. Unless production practice is always regarded as pseudo-communication, our schizophrenic situation will continue and our students will not apply what they have practiced in articulation and construction when involved in interaction. Let us elucidate, then, the ways in which production exercises can take the form of pseudo-communication.

Passive exercises do not prepare students for active use of language: completely controlled and directed activity does not prepare students for autonomous expression.

Each exercise in which he is involved must demand of the student close attention, abstraction (recognition of the requirements of the particular situation), and active construction (requiring recall of stored cognitive information and judicious selection). Exercises which can be performed mechanically are useful only for demonstration of associations of forms, of sys-

tematic patternings, or of relationships. They allow the student time to see the picture: to observe the interplay of surface elements or grasp the principle. They serve an introductory function, after which they are no longer of use unless it appears later that the student is confused, when they may be reintroduced for clarification or confirmation. They must lead directly to intensive practice in the type of construction which requires the student to produce utterances he himself has selected, until he shows he has control of that particular aspect of the language. Opportunity must then be given without delay for the student to use what he has been learning within the wider syntactic system he has been building up. Thus <u>every extension of linguistic competence is tested out immediately in natural communicative use</u>.

Luria has pointed out that grammatical speech will not arise if there is no objective necessity for speech communication.[9] We must create that necessity by the design of our activities.

How then can intensive practice exercises become <u>pseudo-communication</u> and gradually lead to real communication? Here I shall set out some guidelines.

1. As each exercise is designed, it should be given a <u>situational context and a lexical content which are readily transferable to interchanges</u> between instructor and student or student and student.

<u>Are we practicing question forms</u>? Then what is the transferability of items which produce questions with zero probability of occurrence?

--We are sitting in the hall.

Are we sitting in the hall?

-- Janet and I are at the movies.

Are Janet and I at the movies?

How often in conversation do we move from statement to question anyway, unless there is a change of reference as in:

"I've been waiting a quarter of an hour. Have you been waiting too?"

2. After a brief presentation of forms, that is, teacher directed practice to develop familiarity with a particular aspect of the language, the activity should move to interchange between student and student. Student directed practice may take the form of a chaining activity in a large group (e.g., question-answer, question-answer from student to student), or of a small group activity with a student leader. In a small group activity students teach and learn from each other while the instructor listens to see what further directed practice may be required. Small groups which are self-selected also provide for those variations in ability and pace which are so necessary for individual learning.

Student-directed activity moves smoothly into some inter-team competition or game which enables groups to test each other out. For any aspect of language structure a game or simulated activity can be invented which forces the students into autonomous activity in which they produce the same types of responses as in an artificial teacher-directed exercise, but this time of their own volition. It is this conscious and intentional progress at all times from teacher-directed demonstration to student-directed application to autonomous student production that

makes the further step to spontaneous interaction natural and effortless. In this way Personality B is involved early in the practice sequence and is not suddenly called into play in an artificial "extra" activity.

3. With a little imagination even the simplest of structures can be practiced in autonomous production.

--Are we practicing affirmative and negative statements?

Students can compete in producing the most improbable statements or set themselves up as a Liars' Club:

"I borrowed a thousand dollars but I didn't pay it back."

"Last night I flew to the moon and I didn't come back."

-- Are we practicing question forms?

A simulated telephone link may be set up and each student required to ask questions until he has been able to identify the person calling, until he has found out what a presumably diffident caller wanted to ask him, or until he has extracted from the caller what he wanted him to do. Although this is a simulated situation, it parallels a possible communication situation.

Another realistic way of eliciting question forms is for the teacher to give Student A vague instructions to transmit to Student B. Student B must continue to ask questions of Student A and Student A of the teacher until Student B is quite clear about what he has to do. When Student B has completed the required task he reports back to the teacher on what he has done so that the teacher can verify that the original message was accurately transmitted.

--Are we practicing indirect speech?

The teacher transmits information very softly to one student who is expected to pass on to the class what the teacher has said:

"He said he saw an accident on the way to class."

"He said one person was injured."

This can be a three-way transmission:

Instructor says to Student A: "I don't like rock music."

Student A says quietly to Student B: "He says he doesn't like rock music."

Student B says to the class: "He said he didn't like rock music."

Although this is a structured exercise, it simulates a possible situation where, for instance, people at one end of a table cannot hear what their fellow guests are saying.

Another variation of the same activity is the familiar parlor game of "Confidences" where one person whispers to the next along the line what his neighbor tells him has been said by the originator of the message. The last person in the line repeats aloud what he thinks he was told and this is compared with the original message. This can be a very amusing activity because of the distortions which creep in as the message is inaccurately perceived and reconstructed by different persons in the group.

4. Whether we are using expansion, completion, or translation exercises, we have the possibility of two types: Type A which provides only for Personality A, and Type B which encourages the emergence of the innovative Personality B.

A Type A expansion exercise is purely manipulative. Students are supplied with elements they must insert at the correct places in a basic sentence frame. A Type B expansion exercise provides students with the opportunity to create new sentences from the basic frame by expanding it as they wish as often as they wish. (This activity can become a competition to see which students can expand the meaning of the utterance still further through the addition of another word or phrase.)

Type A expansion exercise.

Basic frame: He goes to town.

Instructor: Often.

Student(s): He often goes to town.

Instructor: On Saturdays.

Student(s): He often goes to town on Saturdays...

Type B expansion exercise.

This may be a competition or a chaining activity.

Student A: He goes to town.

Student B: He often goes to town.

Student C: He often goes to town on Wednesdays.

Student D: He often goes to town by train on Wednesdays.

Student E: He often goes to town by train with his sister on Wednesdays....

The competition continues till students run out of inspiration or possibilities of insertion. Note that students not only have the opportunity to develop the meaning as they wish, but in doing so they reproduce the whole expanded sentence each time as part of their own production.

A similar division can be made in types of completion exercises. In a Type A completion exercise a fixed segment is retained, varying perhaps in tense or person in concert with the element the instructor supplies. In a Type B completion exercise, the student can make his own semantic contribution within the syntactic framework he is acquiring.

Type A completion exercise.

In the following exercise you will hear the model sentence:

"I took his pencil because he took mine."

Throughout the exercise you will retain a concluding segment of similar meaning to "because he took mine" but as the introductory segment varies you will vary the person referred to in the concluding segment.

Model: I took his pencil because he took mine.

Instructor: He took my book.

Student(s): He took my book because I took his.

Instructor: We took their seats.

Student(s): We took their seats because they took ours.

Type B completion exercise.

Students are asked to invent excuses for aberrant behavior on their own part or on the part of other students in the group.

Student A: I sat in his place because he sat in mine.

Student B: I ate her lunch because she ate mine.

Student C: Mary broke John's pencil because he broke hers.

Student D: My father used my mother's car because she used his.

The Type A activity may be useful to allow the student time to assimilate the operations of the basic structure, but the Type B activity is essential if students are to develop the command and confidence they need for interaction activities.

Sometimes oral translation exercises are used, when the class has a homogeneous language background and the instructor is familiar with this language. In this case, we again have the possibility of Type A and Type B exercises.

In a Type A translation exercise students translate rapidly a series of unconnected sentences linked only by their central attention to a difficult point of grammar or an idiomatic turn of phrase. In a Type B translation exercise the same attention can be paid to a specific problem of grammar (e.g., use of past tenses) but the sentences in the sequence have a semantic relatedness or a situational development such that the students can simulate a simultaneous interpretation situation, or pretend to relay the information sentence by sentence to a presumably monolingual visitor in their midst. Once again the activity is the same but the situation has an authenticity which prepares students to use the language in real situations when the opportunity arises.

So we could continue . . . To avoid schizophrenia let us keep most of our production practice time for Type B activities which develop quickly and easily into genuine interaction, that is, use of language for the natural purposes of language. In this way, we will wean our students early from dependence on direction from without, thus preparing them psychologically for the uninhibited autonomy of the confident language-user.

N O T E S

1. The perceived goal may, of course, be listening comprehension or reading, in which case a different design will be indicated. Here I am concerned with programs for which facility in oral communication is the goal. I have made some methodological suggestions for listening and reading programs in "Linguistic and Psychological Factors in Speech Perception and their Implications for Teaching Materials" in W.M. Rivers, Speaking in Many Tongues (Newbury House, 1972).

2. These systems are described and discussed by Bruner in considerable detail in J.S.Bruner, Toward a Theory of Instruction (Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 10-14, and in J.S. Bruner, Rose R. Olver, Patricia M. Grenfield, et al., Studies in Cognitive Growth (Wiley, 1966), pp. 6-48.

3. Studies in Cognitive Growth, p. 6.

4. In "The Foreign-Language Teacher and Cognitive Psychology or Where Do We Go from Here?" in Speaking in Many Tongues (Newbury House, 1972), I have quoted a number of cognitive psychologists and certain linguists of the generative semantics group who consider that acquisition of language draws on the general cognitive processes basic to other learning.

5. In Studies in Cognitive Growth this is spelled "ikonic."

6. J.S. Bruner, Toward a Theory of Instruction, pp. 5-6.

7. It is at this point that much of value can be drawn from Fillmore's linguistic theory showing how the new language expresses universal relations within its own system.

8. For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see my article "Contrastive Linguistics in Textbook and Classroom" in Speaking in Many Tongues (1972)

9. A.R. Luria and F.I. IUdovich, Speech and the Development of Mental Processes in the Child: An Experimental Investigation, ed. J. Simon (London: Staples Press, 1959),pp. 28-64.